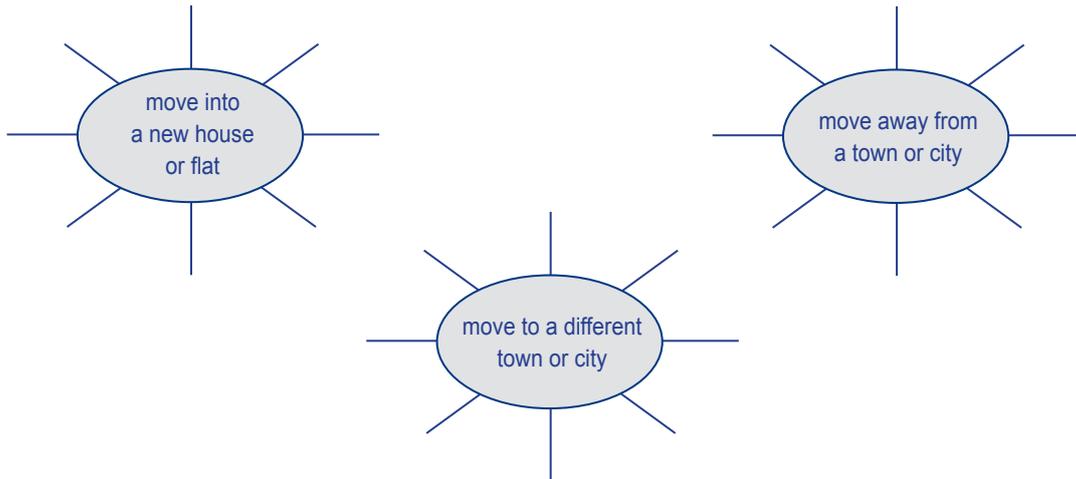


German city offers workers a free one-month stay

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

With a partner, briefly discuss what might motivate people to do each of the following things. Write your ideas onto the mind maps.



Compare your mind maps with other students.

2 Key words

Find key words in the article that match the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. something that is special or beautiful in some way _____ (para 3)
2. interesting or attractive with a slightly strange and old-fashioned quality _____ (para 3)
3. persuading someone to do something by making it look very attractive _____ (para 6)
4. from a distance _____ (para 6)
5. believed that something is true, although you do not know for certain _____ (para 7)
6. someone who uses money to start businesses and make business deals _____ (para 9)
7. having a strong fear and dislike of people from other countries and cultures _____ (para 12)
8. protecting the interests of people who were born in a country or have lived there for a long time against those of more recent immigrants _____ (para 12)
9. a second election that is organized when the first one does not have a clear winner _____ (para 12)
10. just beginning or developing _____ (para 13)
11. work that is done to make something look newer or more attractive _____ (para 13)
12. extremely important because it has a major effect on the result of something _____ (para 19)

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Try before you buy: German city offers workers a free one-month stay

Picturesque Görlitz is offering free lodging and studio space in exchange for feedback on what potential residents want from a town

David Lepeska

25 September, 2019

- 1 In 2018, Eva Bodenmüller read about a town in eastern Germany inviting people to live there for a month for free. She and her partner, Carsten Borck, an artist, knew they had to leave their residence in Italy soon and weren't looking forward to moving back to their native Berlin.
- 2 "I thought: 'Why not Görlitz?'" said Bodenmüller, a freelance journalist.
- 3 Görlitz, Germany's easternmost town, is a well-preserved gem that has played the part of quaint central-European towns in Hollywood films, including *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and *The Reader*. But its pastel-coloured old town, which draws 140,000 tourists a year, hides a darker reality.
- 4 The town has Germany's lowest wages and one of the country's highest shares of far-right voters. After the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, easterners fled west in droves, driving Görlitz's population down more than 25% to 54,000 in 2013.
- 5 Town officials decided they needed to do something to reverse this trend and hit upon the idea of offering a free one-month stay, no strings attached.
- 6 Other cities had already been experimenting with the idea of luring new residents by offering to cover their housing. Detroit was the first big city to try it, launching an innovative programme of paying promising young professionals to live and work in the city for a year, and today the idea is being used everywhere from the Greek island of Antikythera to Candela, Italy, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, which offers \$10,000 to remote workers to move there for a year.
- 7 The proportion of workers who conduct their business remotely is growing. Already, millions of people spend much of their adult lives moving from one place to another. The officials behind Görlitz's programme figured it could both attract some of those nomadic workers and give them the chance to learn some lessons on how to reverse its population decline.
- 8 The Görlitz-based Interdisciplinary Centre for Ecological and Revitalizing Urban Transformation (IZS), which is overseeing Testing the City, as the project is known, received more than 150 applications. Two-thirds were from larger cities, and several came from outside Germany, including from Hungary, the Czech Republic, the US and the UK.
- 9 The 54 individuals and groups participating are singles, couples and families ranging from their 20s to 60s, including digital entrepreneurs, a film-maker, a model, visual artists and musicians. Each is assigned to one of three project-maintained flats and offered free use of one of three spaces for work.
- 10 Though the municipality hopes that some will permanently relocate to Görlitz, the main intention is for IZS to use participant interviews and questionnaires to inform a national urban development policy to help revive Germany's smaller towns. "Our aim is to learn more about what people need, and if they move, what their motivation is," said IZS head Robert Knippschild.
- 11 Görlitz is a fascinating place to test these theories. The town has around 7,000 vacant flats, and unemployment is a third higher than the national average. This, in part, is why Görlitz has taken in 1,200 refugees. But surveys have shown immigration to be the most urgent issue for residents of eastern Germany, where the far right has taken hold.
- 12 Görlitz has not seen the sort of xenophobic violence that has struck Chemnitz and Dresden, but has been called "the living room" of the nativist Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. In 2019, the AfD came out on top in Görlitz in the European Parliament elections and the state election on 1 September, polling at more than 37%. It also won the first round of the mayoral election, though the Christian Democratic Union candidate, Octavian Ursu, won the runoff in June.
- 13 "It was a tough campaign," said Ursu, a Romanian immigrant who played lead trumpet in the local philharmonic orchestra before turning to politics. He sees Testing the City as part of a budding revival, which includes a new data-analysis centre employing 120 scientists and engineers, a Siemens hydrogen technologies innovation campus, which will employ another 100, and a €36m facelift for the art nouveau municipal hall.

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- 14 Ursu believes the key to creating jobs is a more welcoming society. "I've said to the people, you must think about whether you want to have an open city (a European city) or a closed city," he said.
- 15 Bodenmüller and Borck said they spent a lot of time during their stay talking to locals and found a town of extremes. "In other places, you generally have people from different groups talking to each other," said Bodenmüller, who has lived in Berlin, Munich and several smaller cities. "But here there is no centre – there are just the two sides."
- 16 With the project about halfway through, four participants have committed to move to Görlitz, including German-Finnish poet Mark Mallon and his wife, Finnish artist Venla Saalo. The couple decided to leave Berlin because of its traffic, pollution and high rents, and settled in Görlitz in April. "Görlitz feels like a lively town with a lot of young people, students, opportunities, empty spaces and, on the other hand, peace and remoteness," they said. "It is a great combination for creative work."
- 17 Borck and Bodenmüller like the cheap rents and high density of organic grocery shops and vegetarian restaurants but wish Görlitz had better regional transport and more open-mindedness. They also wished they had more time there.
- 18 "It's very intense, to try to meet people, find our way around the town and do our work in just four weeks," said Bodenmüller. "If we could stay here longer, we could leave and come back and have a better chance of understanding the town."
- 19 Knippschild's early conclusions from the pilot project suggest that cultural offerings and leisure activities are crucial to attracting nomadic workers, as are reliable travel connections and good housing.
- 20 "People are taking the project seriously, thinking about which phase of life they are in and what they need in terms of housing and living," he said of the participants. "This is giving us a great deal of insight into the strengths and weaknesses of Görlitz."

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3 Comprehension check

Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Where is Görlitz?
2. Why is Görlitz so attractive to film-makers?
3. Why are there so many empty flats in Görlitz?
4. What do you know about the political situation in Görlitz?
5. Why is the town offering free accommodation?
6. What kind of people, in particular, is Görlitz hoping to attract with its free-accommodation scheme?
7. What has the town learnt from the project so far?
8. What other places are trying similar schemes, and what incentives are they offering participants?

4 Phrases

a. Find and underline these phrases in the article.

1. in droves
2. no strings attached
3. take hold

b. Talk about what the phrases mean. Look up any you do not know.

c. Use the phrases in sentences of your own about different topics. Which is the most useful phrase for you?

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5 Questions – pair work

a. Choose one of the following tasks.

1. You find the project interesting. Write five questions you would like to ask a couple who have recently completed the month-long project.
2. You are a journalist. Write five questions you would like to ask the Görlitz Testing the City project managers.
3. You are considering taking part in the project. Write five questions you would like to ask the project managers before you commit yourself to a month-long stay in Görlitz.

b. Compare your questions with other pairs who chose the same task. Who is most likely to get the best quality information from the people they talk to?

c. Improve any questions that are not completely clear or that are unlikely to lead to you getting the desired information.

6 Discussion

- Would you ever consider taking part in a project like this – in Germany, the USA, Italy, Greece or elsewhere?
 - If so, what would you hope to learn from it?
 - If not, why not?
- If you could live anywhere in the world, rent-free for a month, where would it be?

7 Webquest

- Find out more about the town of Görlitz.
 - What would you like to see there?
 - Why is it sometimes called Görlitwood?
 - How could you get there from where you are now?

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KEY

2 Key words

1. gem
2. quaint
3. luring
4. remote
5. figured
6. entrepreneur
7. xenophobic
8. nativist
9. runoff
10. budding
11. facelift
12. crucial

3 Find the information

1. in the far east of Germany
2. It is a very well-preserved and attractive central-European town.
3. There are very few jobs there, and they are poorly paid. Unemployment is a third higher than the German average. Since 1989, it has lost 25% of its population.
4. The far-right nativist AfD party is extremely strong there.
5. It wants to find out how to appeal to new residents in order to reverse its population decline.
6. people who are able to work remotely
7. Cultural offerings and leisure activities are important, as are reliable transport and good housing.
8. Detroit – paying promising young professionals to live and work in the city for a year; the Greek island of Antikythera; Candela, Italy; Tulsa, Oklahoma – offering \$10,000 to remote workers to move there for a year

4 Phrases

1. in large numbers
2. with no special conditions that limit an offer or agreement
3. become stronger and difficult to stop